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SUBJECT: Javier Solana to the Middle East; Will Meet S/E Mitchell

¶1. SUMMARY: Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), announced at the February 23 General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) meeting of EU-27 Foreign Ministers, that he would travel to the Middle East February 24 to 28. Solana's trip will take him to Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Solana is to meet with Senator George Mitchell in the region. This trip precedes Solana's participation in the international conference in support of the Palestinian economy, for the reconstruction of Gaza, to be held in Sharm El-Sheikh on March 2. END SUMMARY

¶2. Billed as a bid to help bolster the ceasefire in Gaza, Javier Solana's trip will take him first to Syria, February 24-25, where he will meet President Bashar Al-Assad, Deputy Prime Minister Abdallah Al-Dardari and Foreign Minister Walid Al-Mouallem.

¶3. In Lebanon, on Wednesday, 25 February, Solana will meet President Michel Sleiman, Parliament Speaker, Nabih Berri, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh.

¶4. In Egypt, February 25 and 26, Solana will meet with President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit.

¶5. In Israel, on February 26, Solana will meet Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been tasked to form the new government, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, and Defence Minister Ehud Barak.

¶6. In the Palestinian Territories, on February 27 and 28, Mr Solana will meet the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, the Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Saeb Erekat, and U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell. The High Representative also plans to travel to Gaza, where he will meet the UNRWA General Commissioner, Karen Abu Ziyad, the UNRWA Director of Operations, John King, and members of the civil society and the banking sectors.

MURRAY